

more successful attempt to set up a multilateral food aid program—the World Food Programme. It was the least ambitious of the three proposals.

“The Indian delegation raised the idea of a world food bank at the 1957 FAO Conference. It got scant consideration then, but by 1959 many countries, including Canada, began to show interest. Douglas Harkness, the Minister of Agriculture, referred to it in his speech to the FAO Conference that year, intending to test support for such an undertaking. After he left, various delegations came to me and asked me how serious Canada was about it, and some [delegations] from developing countries offered strong support. I had to say, ‘Well, wait a little,’ because I knew this proposal had not even been considered by Cabinet.

“Alvin Hamilton took over as Agriculture Minister in October 1960 and he began to push the proposal strongly. At the time both the United States and Canada had big surpluses of wheat and dairy products, but we saw a world food bank not as a means of solving the surplus problems or as a way to support high domestic prices, but rather as a means of using these stocks intelligently to bring about agricultural development in the poorer countries.

“The FAO had done some excellent studies. Mordecai Ezekiel, a senior FAO officer and a well-known economist, wrote a top-notch report on using food aid for development. These provided a really good basis for our discussions. It was timely, too, in the United States, with John Kennedy as President and George McGovern as administrator of its Food for Peace Program. Many supporters of a World Food Programme hoped it could bring some multilateral control over the movement of surplus foods for aid, which until then was mainly a U.S. initiative. It was easier, of course, to set up a World Food Programme than a full scale Food Bank or to control completely the U.S. program of surplus disposal.

“Anyway, the Diefenbaker Government was sold on the idea of its being the right thing to do to help people who were short of food, and not inconsistent with moving surplus food stocks. At the FAO conference in November 1961, Alvin Hamilton co-sponsored a resolution approving a three-year experimental program; and a similar resolution was submitted to the UN General Assembly. The target agreed upon for the three years was \$100 million, and the Americans were putting up \$50 million in cash and in kind. This was just peanuts, compared with what they were giving away in their own bilateral surplus disposal program. Canada put up \$5 million in cash. Even this small target figure produced opposition from some Canadian officials, who feared it amounted to over-commitment to a project [that] they thought would fail during the first three years. But Alvin Hamilton was a prominent minister and he won support from colleagues. It was a case when political figures were ahead of officials on an issue.

“When the experimental program was begun, Diefenbaker ordered that Canada give the \$5 million cash in a lump sum and the food stocks be moved as they were called upon by WFP. But then the Canadian dollar dropped like lead and the Canadian commitment was paid in instalments over three years, which appeased the people in Finance who had to deal with deficits.